Strengthening inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches in food governance

Overview

Food systems issues are complex and interconnected, but historically, policy processes and governance arrangements for food and climate operated in silos. For instance, policies to address nutrition issues are often handled by health ministries, while climate and biodiversity issues are tackled by environmental decision-makers. Identifying and managing trade-offs across social, economic and environmental dimensions is challenging. Power imbalances in food systems, along with long-lasting lock-ins and path dependencies, exacerbate the complexity. Power imbalances between actors can often result in exclusion from decision making, inequities, exploitation, malnutrition and food insecurity for marginalised groups.

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is an important component for ensuring a holistic, equitable and inclusive approach to policy making and implementation for food systems transformation. **Multi-stakeholder collaboration** (MSC) refers to collaborative arrangements among stakeholders from two or more distinct spheres of society (e.g., public sector, private sector and/or civil society) who pool their resources together, sharing risks and responsibilities to solve common issues, handle conflicts, and/or elaborate shared visions. This collaboration also helps to realise shared objectives, manage common resources, and/or ensure the protection, production or delivery of an outcome of collective and/or public interest.

Concrete measures to implement

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) have jointly created a guide on how to improve multi-stakeholder collaboration for sustainable food systems transformation. The following measures are a summary of this guidance. For detailed steps and examples, please consult **the guide**.

- Foster broad and inclusive multi-stakeholder participation:

  - With special attention to those who are traditionally excluded and marginalised from decision-making, engaging different food systems stakeholder groups (e.g., from public and private sectors; civil society organisations; community-based, grassroots and Indigenous Peoples groups; NGOs; consumers; organisations representing producers; food systems workers; international and donor communities; academia and knowledge institutions; and the media).

  - Ensure inclusive multi-stakeholder representation by assessing and balancing representation around the table from the outset, at different scales and levels of engagement, through a comprehensive food systems and stakeholders mapping and analysis.

  - Conduct a detailed stakeholder mapping exercise, exploring various stakeholders' motivations for engagement. The analysis may include a political economy dimension to understand power dynamics and the interests of various actors in maintaining or changing the current state. This nuanced insight guides strategies to handle potential resistance and identifies alliances supportive of the collaboration.

- Ensure stakeholders have a solid understanding of the food system:

  - Define characteristics of food system assessments. This can include the analysis of the food and agriculture system and its impacts, an analysis of policies and initiatives, an analysis of existing institutions within the food system and recommendations for focus areas and policy responses.

  - Choose the right methodology depending on available financial and human resources to assess food systems, such as using the **Food**

Systems Decision-Support Toolbox for a comprehensive assessment of food systems.

- Nurture inclusive and effective collaboration:

    - Establish a governance structure for MSC initiatives. This may include a steering committee, working groups and task teams, and a support structure, which can be based in a neutral organisation or independent entity. The governance structure should be adapted depending on power structures, system entry points, the institutions involved, resources and capacities. While establishing a governance structure, managing biases, ensuring inclusiveness, making decision-making processes, achieving consensus and managing operations should all be considered.

    - Establish a communication strategy and prioritise good facilitation to ensure that all stakeholders are being reached and heard.

    - Manage power imbalances by strengthening stakeholders' capacities to actively engage. This can be achieved by ensuring an enabling environment that is conducive to engagement, stimulating collective action, appraising power imbalances, and building competencies and skills for collaboration.

    - Work through conflict by developing a shared group identity and using techniques such as synchronized de-escalation and mediation.

- Define a compass and a roadmap:

    - Building a shared vision and strategy among all stakeholders is crucial, as it fosters resilience and the strength to resist government change, improve policy coherence and facilitate better communication.

    - Defining a theory of change is a useful approach to deal with complexity when developing a strategy.

    - Move from strategies to action by setting clear objectives, a mix of measures and instruments to achieve the goals and a well-defined institutional framework.

    - Engage in continuous participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning to distil learnings for any adjustments needed to the strategy. The criteria to evaluate an initiative should include relevance, effectiveness, impact, coherence, efficiency and sustainability.

- Secure sustainability of collaboration:

    - Ensure institutionalisation through these elements: a legal form of registration, the governance structure and funding.

    - Finance inclusive multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure its sustainability, ideally diversifying the sources of funding.

Haji Haji, funded by WWF, collecting data on fish for sale for the Beach Managemant Unit (B.M.U) and WWF Tanzania. Mafia Island, Tanzania.

Tools and MRV systems to monitor progress

Guides and handbooks

UNEP, FAO and UNDP guide

Annex 1 of the UNEP, FAO and UNDP guide outlines a suite of tools and resources for monitoring, evaluation and learning in each step of the above multi-stakeholder collaboration process, including tools for:
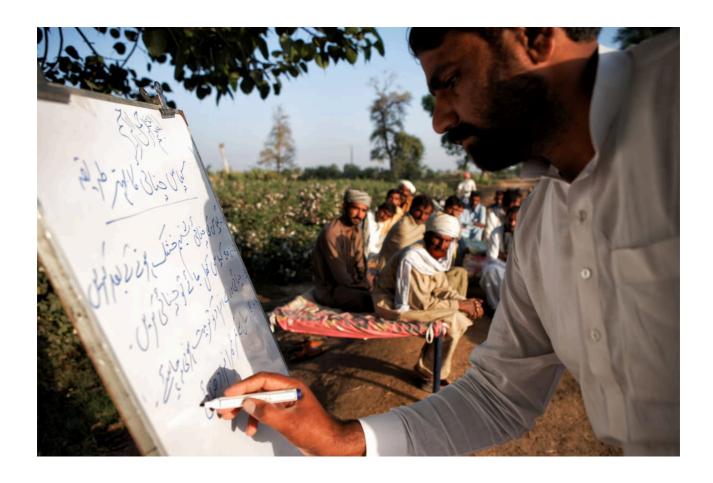
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- Fostering broad multi-stakeholder participation, including tools for:

    - Engaging both public sector and private sector actors.

    - Engaging under-represented and marginalised groups.

    - Stakeholder mapping and analysis.

- Ensuring a good understanding of the food system, including tools for:

    - Food systems mapping and analysis.

- Nurturing inclusive and effective collaboration, including tools for:

    - Starting the collaboration process.

    - Setting up a well-functioning governance structure.

    - Collaborative leadership and partnership management.

    - Successful facilitation.

    - Effective communication.

    - Dealing with power imbalances.

    - Building competencies and skills for multi-stakeholder collaboration.

    - Managing divergent interests and conflict.

    - Overcoming common challenges.

- Defining a compass and a roadmap, including tools for:

- Building a shared vision.

- Developing a strategy.

- Moving from strategy to action.

- Participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning.
  - Securing sustainability of collaboration, including tools for:

    - Financing multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Climate change mitigation benefits

Multi-stakeholder collaboration in food governance can lead to substantial mitigation benefits by promoting holistic, resource efficient and sustainable practices throughout the food system.

Adaptation benefits

Multi-stakeholder collaboration in food governance can lead to substantial adaptation benefits by promoting holistic, resource efficient and sustainable

practices throughout the food system. These adaptation benefits including but not limited to:

- **Biodiversity protection**: Preservation of ecosystems and habitats for various species and reduction in the risk of species extinction.

- **Responsible resource management**: Conservation of natural resources such as water, soils and forests. Mitigation of resource depletion and its negative impacts

- **Clean energy transition**: Reduction of GHG emissions, the mitigation of climate change and the promotion of renewable energy sources and sustainable energy practices.

- **Improved water quality**: Enhanced availability of clean and safe water.

- **Community empowerment**: Strengthening local communities through education and participation which will enhance community resilience and self-reliance.

- **Enhance circular economy**: Promotion of recycling, reuse and waste reduction and the efficient use of resources, reducing environmental impacts.

- **Decreased pollution**: Through various practices, such as reduced use of chemical inputs, that minimise environmental impact.

Other sustainable development benefits

- SDG 2 (Zero hunger): Reducing poverty through better food availability and affordability.

- SDG 3 (Good health and well-being): Reducing dietary health-related illnesses.

- SDG 5 (Gender equality) & SDG 14 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions): Inclusive decision-making.

- SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities)

- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities): Fostering community resilience & Cultural preservation and promotion.

- SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy)

- SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation): Increasing accessibility to clean water and sanitation.

- SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 14 (Life below water), & SDG 15 (Life on land): Transition to sustainable food systems.

- SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals)

Potential challenges, externalities, and trade-offs:

- Collaboration between the private and public sector: Mistrust and tension between the private and public sectors persist, with the private sector frequently prioritising competition over collaboration.

- Unfair commercial advantages: Firms can gain access to information through multi-stakeholder collaboration initiatives that offers them unfair commercial advantages.

- Biases and marginalised communities' exclusion in decision-making processes if there are no support structures or processes to facilitate their participation.

- Power-imbalances: Risk of reinforcing rather than mitigating power imbalances in food systems.

- Conflict of interests: Divergent interests and conflicting priorities among stakeholders may impede progress. Competing agendas and the pursuit of individual goals can create tensions, making it challenging to reach consensus on shared objectives.

- Lack of representation: Incomplete or unequal representation of relevant stakeholders may result in policies that do not consider the interests of all affected parties. Excluding certain groups can lead to policies that are less inclusive and may inadvertently perpetuate inequalities.

- Coordination challenges: Coordinating diverse stakeholders with different organisational structures, communication styles and cultures can be complex. This may result in communication breakdowns, misunderstandings and difficulties in aligning actions and strategies.

- Slow decision-making: Achieving consensus among multiple stakeholders can be time-consuming. Delays in decision-making may occur as participants navigate negotiations, leading to slower response times, which could be critical in dynamic situations.

- Resource intensiveness: Managing a multi-stakeholder collaboration requires significant time, effort and resources. Coordinating meetings, facilitating discussions and ensuring continuous engagement can strain the resources of involved organisations.

- Limited accountability: The diffusion of responsibility among numerous stakeholders can create challenges in holding specific individuals or organisations accountable for outcomes. This lack of accountability may hinder the effective implementation of agreed-upon initiatives.

- Resistance to change: Stakeholders may resist changes that impact their interests, particularly if they feel their concerns are not adequately addressed. Overcoming resistance and ensuring commitment to shared goals can be challenging.

- Loss of focus: With numerous voices and perspectives, there is a risk of losing focus on the core objectives of the collaboration. Balancing inclusivity with a clear and defined agenda is crucial to avoid mission drift.

- Legal and regulatory challenges: Navigating legal and regulatory frameworks that govern different stakeholders can be complex. Ensuring compliance with diverse legal requirements may pose challenges and require careful negotiation.

Measures to address challenges, potential externalities, and trade-offs

- Apply recommended principles for managing conflicts of interest, communicating with partners on possible conflicts of interest and ensuring transparency on internal decision-making.

- Develop and communicate opportunities.

- Raise awareness through sharing benefits and success stories of collaboration.

- Analyse trade-offs: [Conduct an analysis of social, economic and environmental trade-offs](#) to identify the right mix of policies and practices that can minimise them and even generate "trade-ons".

- Include the perspective of vulnerable groups and imagine what challenges they might face to ensure that their concerns are being included.

- Structure multi-stakeholder collaboration initiatives with several levels, such as with sub-groups, working groups and subcommittees, to ensure inclusivity of all groups.

- Develop a group identity and a common vision to highlight urgency, changes and success.

- Engage a mediator to transform dispute through cooperative interaction.

- Establish and foster a shared and easily comprehensible language and communication framework for all stakeholders.

Implementation costs

  - Not available.

Interventions in practice

  - [Antananarivo Food Policy Council in Madagascar:](#) Between 2020 and 2022, the Antananarivo Food Policy Council (AFPC) contributed to the development of a strategy and action plan to strengthen the resilience of Antananarivo's city-region food system. The strategy development built on a participatory assessment of the city-region's food system and was led by a core team composed of the Urban Municipality of Antananarivo, the Analamanga Region and the Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Livestock from the Ministry in Analamanga. The multi-level nature of this team contributed to its success, and their proximity to decision makers facilitated getting political buy-in for the strategy and ensuring its success.

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